

# OKDHS UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2008

A PUBLICATION OF THE OKLAHOMA PUBLIC EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

## Hendrick Confident About OKDHS Audit

After a morning of setting goals for the coming year, OPEA's OKDHS Council moved from OPEA headquarters to the Sequoyah Building Oct. 27 for its quarterly meeting with OKDHS Director Howard Hendrick.

The quarterly meetings provide an opportunity for OKDHS employees to meet in an informal setting with the director of the largest agency in state government.

Over lunch, participants grouped employee concerns into categories including the legislative audit, recruitment and retention, compensation, the 2010 budget, imaging, online Medicaid applications and future plans for OKDHS' aging facilities.

"I have a lot of confidence in our employees and staff," said Hendrick in response to a question about the audit. "I can defend what we do. I'm fine with the audit."

"We are trying to make a difference for a lot of people," he continued. "We are working with fragile families. Our workers are

*(Continued On Page 2)*



OPEA members from Pontotoc County talk with OKDHS Director Howard Hendrick. Left to right, Natasha Perkins, Hendrick, Sheryl Edwards and Rena Scarbrough.

## Council Plans For The Future

Goals for the coming year were at the top of the agenda when the OPEA/OKDHS Council gathered at the OPEA office Oct. 27. Byron

Jackson, who works with non-profit groups across the state, facilitated the meeting and helped the group find common goals as participants tackled the challenges facing OKDHS employees.

"Working with the DHS Council was particularly rewarding," said

Jackson. "You can sense their dedication to the work they do in spite of increasing challenges. We managed to accomplish a lot in a short length of time."

**“W**orking with the DHS Council was particularly rewarding. You can sense their dedication to the work they do in spite of increasing challenges.”

– Byron Jackson, Consultant

and workers who provide an important safety net for Oklahomans. Participants crafted vision statements indicating the

importance of communication, advocacy and unity to accomplish the goals of increasing compensation, preserving benefits and lowering caseloads.

After an exercise in grouping objectives into larger goals and prioritizing them, Council leaders determined a course of action for the next few months. At the top of the list was making contact with legislators and agency administrators about issues affecting the workplace. The top three goals were only two votes apart.

**Legislative and Agency:** Build strong relationships with legislators by organizing local

*(Continued On Page 6)*

## Hendrick Confident (Continued From Page 1)



**Rep. Mike Shelton speaks to OKDHS employees at 55G, including Debra Franklin.**

offices should develop a relationship with their local legislator. What goes on at the Capitol is important, but legislators are very busy and don't have the time they have in the district."

In response to a question on imaging, Hendrick told the participants the agency is working toward a paperless system.

"It's my understanding that imaging is meant to make us more timely and have better accuracy," said an

number one in establishing paternities. We are certifying 77 percent of our food stamp eligibles, meaning we are feeding a lot of families. OKDHS workers are saving the state millions by helping keep people in their homes and out of nursing homes."

With no pay increase this year, OKDHS employees asked if the agency would be providing the \$1,000 bonus program to workers. Hendrick responded that the funds had come from federal incentives in the past and that the agency had not received the federal money for the program this year.

"I am disappointed that the Legislature did not provide an across-the-board pay raise this year," said Hendrick. "It's an election year and that's when we usually see a raise. We need to look at increasing and indexing longevity to reward employees who have stayed with the state."

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Web site, the value of longevity should be increased from \$100 per year to \$185 to restore the purchasing power the benefit had in 1988, when it was last adjusted. OPEA will be pursuing legislation this year to double longevity.

"We need to tell our story," Hendrick responded to a question about how OKDHS workers could help with the agency budget request. "OKDHS

unidentified worker. "But that's not been the case with me or several others I've spoken with about it. Files get lost, and sometimes they get lost indefinitely. I'm not blaming the ones that actually image the documents, but, if just one number or letter is misread or transposed, it creates a bigger mess when it goes to the wrong worker."

Hendrick told participants that he was committed to working out issues with imaging and encouraged workers to send their comments to the imaging center and copy him at [howard.hendrick@okdhs.org](mailto:howard.hendrick@okdhs.org).

The subject moved to "no wrong door," a project to allow clients to input their Medicaid applications themselves. Hendrick told the workers this is only a method of data collection and that OKDHS employees would still be certifying these cases in their local offices.

An Adult Protective Services worker in western Oklahoma expressed concern that he and his co-workers have been given increasing numbers of referrals that should be going to mental health service providers. Hendrick responded that provider agencies should hold a local summit to review processes in the local area.

Child welfare workers, who are working paperless, told the director that the local court system is still operating

with inefficient paperwork that is slowing them down.

"That's a good point," Hendrick responded. "Colorado has been successful in a project integrating their juvenile system, OKDHS and courts."

In response to a question about future plans for the aging buildings at the Southern Oklahoma Resource Center, Hendrick answered that he would pay a visit to look at the situation within the month.

Participants at the meeting told Hendrick that low pay and lack of raises are causing serious recruitment and retention problems.

"We recruited two APS workers; one stayed half a day and the other was



**Rep. Gus Blackwell speaks to OKDHS workers in Guymon in October.**

there for one day," said a rural worker. "Now we aren't getting any applicants."

"The Commission appointed by the governor to look at pay for state employees said we should have a system," Hendrick commented. "If you look at public employment, usually they have a step system. Otherwise employees are eating inflation every year. That's not fair to employees."

"Sixty-eight percent of our employees have college degrees," he added. "We have workers on food stamps."

"Thank you for your service," Hendrick concluded. "I am proud of the work you do and you should be, also. You are making a difference in the lives of Oklahoma families."

# Audit Upcoming For Oklahoma Department Of Human Services

The Legislative Services Bureau has hired a contractor to conduct a performance audit of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services that will be similar to last year's audit of the Department of Corrections.

Hornby Zeller Associates, Inc. has been tapped to complete the job before the beginning of the 2009 legislative session. The management consulting firm is working in programs across the nation, in 30 states and the District of Columbia.

OPEA met with Hornby Zeller Director of Project Operations Karen Hallenbeck to learn more about the audit. During the meeting, OPEA staffers Scott Barger and Trish Frazier discussed concerns the Association has over compensation, turnover and caseload standards.

Hornby Zeller's primary focus will be on child welfare services, studying:

- ✦ Organizational structure, management and controls;
- ✦ Policy and program implementation;
- ✦ Personnel and training, including

retention and turnover;

- ✦ Supply, training and retention of foster parents.

The auditors will interview employees and ask them to complete surveys about their jobs and workload.

They also will talk to parents, foster parents, judges and other stakeholders in the child welfare system. In addition, case reviews from sample cases and data

analysis will be utilized in the study. All information will go directly to the auditor and not through agency channels. The data will be presented collectively and the source of information cannot be traced, so employees should not worry about what they say to interviewers.

Hornby Zeller will compile outcomes and standards based on national best practices, which will be used to measure the agency's performance. A

preliminary report will be released to a legislative working group for their feedback, and the final report should be ready for 2009 legislative session.

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**"O**PEA welcomes the audit and is certain the findings will affirm the Association's concerns that OKDHS workers are underpaid and struggling under the burden of increasing caseloads."

— OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley

Association's concerns that OKDHS workers are underpaid and struggling under the burden of increasing caseloads," said

OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley. "The audit will cost the taxpayers of Oklahoma \$420,000. Hopefully, the DHS audit will not be put on the shelf beside the DOC probe last year, and the Legislature will provide funding for improvements in both agencies."

Members of the legislative working group overseeing the audit are State Reps. Ron Peters, Kris Steele, Susan Winchester, Scott BigHorse, Richard Morrissette and Wade Rousselot.

## OKDHS Commission Seeks 47 Percent Increase In 2010 Budget Request

The OKDHS Commission voted at its September meeting to submit a 2010 budget request to the Office of State Finance that asks for 47 percent above this year's appropriation, an additional \$265.7 million.

Director Howard Hendrick reviewed the purpose of the recommendation, which is more than the agency has asked for in the past.

Just to maintain its 2009 base, OKDHS will need an additional \$37 million in state funds. This includes

money for benefits and mileage increases and the need to replace lost federal funds.

The agency is also requesting \$235 million to annualize program growth, accommodate higher program utilization and maintain program viability. Part of this request is 208 new workers for local offices in the Field Operations Division.

"Over the past few years, OKDHS caseloads have continued to rise, without new FTEs to do the work," said

OPEA Policy and Research Director Trish Frazier.

According to the OKDHS Annual Report:

- ✦ Advantage Waiver recipients have doubled from 11,128 to 23,585 since 2000.

- ✦ The monthly average of food stamp recipients, now the "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program" (SNAP), has increased by 56 percent, from 266,402 to 415,397, since 2001.

(Continued On Page 4)

# OKDHS Salaries Continue To Lag Behind Market, According To Data

The OPEA staff has obtained data from the Office of Personnel Management that compares compensation between large OKDHS job classifications and the market, which includes contiguous states.

Average state employee compensation was 12.5 percent below market in July 2007, and this figure probably has increased by at least 1 percent since then. The data is from July 2008 reports that OPM is utilizing for the 2008 Compensation Report, which should be released in December.

According to the OKDHS Compensation Division, salary

adjustments have been made to direct care and nursing positions to bring them within 5 percent of the state agency market. However, the market is constantly adjusting and these numbers might be obsolete.

“According to the data, DHS salaries seriously lag behind even the state market in several large job classifications,” said OPEA Policy and Research Director Trish Frazier. “The agency has been giving small raises to bring OKDHS compensation to 95 percent of other similar state classifications. Clearly, the agency must have funding from the Legislature to make significant progress in solving this problem.”

## Lagging Behind

	Average	Market	Difference	
H20A Social Services Specialist	\$25,955.32	\$30,287.66	\$4,332.34	17.00%
H20B Social Services Specialist	\$31,085.17	\$31,845.65	\$760.48	2.50%
H20C Social Services Specialist	\$34,628.51	\$38,514.14	\$3,885.63	11.00%
H20D Social Services Specialist	\$39,183.43	\$41,409.05	\$2,225.62	5.70%
H23A Child Welfare Specialist	\$28,578.68	\$34,680.97	\$6,102.29	21.00%
H23B Child Welfare Specialist	\$32,331.59	\$37,998.60	\$5,667.01	17.50%
H23C Child Welfare Specialist	\$35,749.87	\$43,010.34	\$7,260.47	20.00%
H23D Child Welfare Specialist	\$42,732.05	\$46,892.68	\$4,160.63	10.00%

## 47 Percent Increase (Continued From Page 3)

✦ Medicaid recipients have increased by 67 percent since 2001, from 431,650 to 723,669.

Finally, the agency is asking for an additional 163 FTEs for ongoing needs and expansion of programs.

“The OPEA/OKDHS Council has

made it a priority to bring local legislators into our offices and tell them our story,” said OKDHS Council Director Haley Faulkenberry. “Over the years, we have continued to do more with few additional staff. The Legislature must fund more positions to provide workers relief and

allow us to better serve our clients.”

OPEA will be gathering information for workers to share with legislators in local offices.

If you would like to set up a meeting, contact Brandon Watkins at [brandonw@opea.org](mailto:brandonw@opea.org).

# Turnover Is Costly For State, OPEA Executive Director Tells Subcommittee

OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley told the House General Government Subcommittee on Government Modernization Oct. 14 that turnover is costing Oklahoma taxpayers approximately \$85 million annually. The estimate, which is calculated by the Office of Personnel Management each year, is considered to be a conservative number.

Zearley spoke to the subcommittee during an interim study on “The impact of cost and implications of state employee turnover.”

“We can’t keep going down this road,” said Zearley. “Turnover in Oklahoma state government is 13.5 percent, compared to 8.2 percent for state and local government nationally.”

“But that is not the whole story,” he told the panel. “There are classifications with turnover rates so high, the quality of services can be compromised. Recently, we learned the turnover rate for patient care assistants at the Norman Veterans Center is 95 percent. We must do better for our veterans.”

OPEA unveiled a first step toward solving the turnover problem in the State Employee Turnover Reduction

Act. The proposed legislation would require that state employees be provided with a 2.5-percent pay increase each year until turnover costs fall below \$40 million. This would not exclude the need for the Legislature to provide an across-the-board pay raise for state employees.

“State employees are feeling the crunch of the economy and the rising cost of insurance,” said Zearley. “The top priority when the Legislature returns in 2009 must be to grant a pay raise for state employees.”

Zearley echoed the data presented by OPM that state employee pay had consistently tracked more than 10 percent



**Jeanette Rice, senior vice president for corporate and human resources at American Fidelity Assurance Company, briefs the House General Government Subcommittee on Government Modernization as Rep. Dennis Johnson, foreground, looks on.**

below market in the past 10 years. He also said compensation for unclassified employees has increased almost twice as much as for classified workers.

“Even though agencies have the statutory authority to increase salaries through pay movement mechanisms, classified employees are limited to legislative pay raises,” said Zearley. “Agencies have not been provided with funding for the pay movement mechanisms. It’s like having a check with no money in the bank.”

Another important point in OPEA’s presentation was a comparison of the state employee longevity plan and step increases for other jobs (See Table 1).

The longevity schedule for state employees has not changed in 20 years.

The panel also heard from Jeanette Rice, senior vice president for corporate and human resources at American Fidelity Assurance Company, who gave a report from the Governor’s Task Force on State Employee Compensation. She outlined the

*(Continued On Page 8)*

**Table 1**

## Comparison Of The State Employee Longevity Plan And Step Increases For Other Jobs (Total Increase After 10 Years)

Highway Patrol Steps (seven years) . . . . .	\$23,836
Oklahoma Teacher Steps . . . . .	\$4,350
Federal Employee Steps . . . . .	\$10,580
Oklahoma State Employee Longevity . . . . .	\$1,062

## Council Plans (Continued From Page 1)

visits and staying in contact, both during the legislative session and the interim. Continue to meet quarterly with the director.

**Compensation and Benefits:** Work to increase compensation for all OKDHS employees, including longevity, and maintain benefits.

**Education and Information Sharing:** Provide information about OKDHS issues and an avenue for members to discuss concerns.

**Recruitment/membership:** Increase the effectiveness of OPEA in OKDHS by recruiting co-workers to join.

**Morale/image:** Work to improve the morale and image of OKDHS workers.

**Positive change:** Bring positive change to OKDHS through involvement in OPEA.

**Participation:** Organize offices for OPEA. Communicate more with OPEA.

“We have a great start on the coming year with this out-



OKDHS Council members prioritize goals for 2009.

line,” said DHS Council Director Haley Faulkenberry.

“Already, several work sites have plans to invite legislators for lunch meetings. While the legislative goal was determined to be the most critical, all of the goals are important to the success of our program for the next year.”

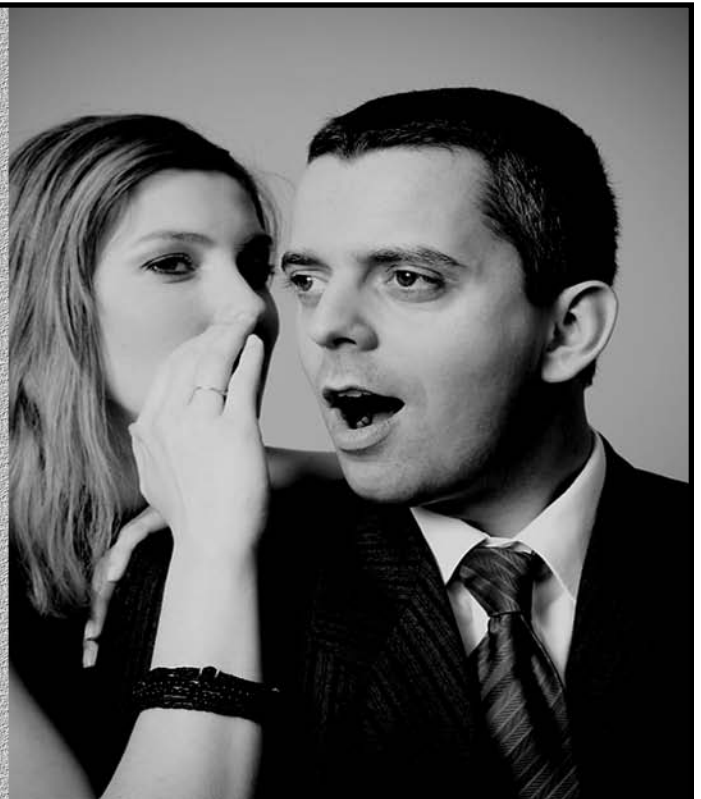
LET'S NOT KEEP  
OPEA  
A SECRET!

IF YOU TELL SOMEONE ...

AND THAT PERSON TELLS SOMEONE ...

PRETTY SOON, EVERY STATE  
EMPLOYEE WILL KNOW WHAT A  
GREAT ORGANIZATION OPEA IS!

Tell Someone Today!



# OPEA Launches Network For OKDHS Employees

The Oklahoma Public Employees Association has launched a private social network for its members at the Oklahoma Department of Human Services.

The network allows members to communicate and share discussions in forums, create groups and share photos and videos with each other. Acceptance into this social network is included in each level of membership in the Association.

“We wanted OPEA members to be able to interact and collaborate with each other, not just by e-mail or at an annual conference but also on a daily basis using the Web,” OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley said.

“So with the explosion of Facebook and LinkedIn, we wanted to offer a social type service like those, but for an association,” Zearley added. “Adding a social network to the list of services we provide not only

separates us from other associations but also adds more value to our services for our members.”

OPEA’s new social network is connected to Flickr, which allows members to share photos with other members in the network. Other services offered in the social network are songs for podcasts, videos, blogs and RSS feeds.

“OPEA continues to be the leader in developing new methods such as the podcast show we launched last year, the political site Capitol Advantage we added in January and now our social network.

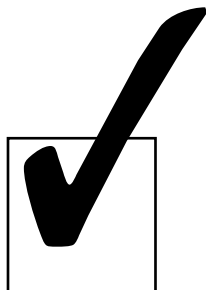
We will continue to add more beneficial member services such as our new private social network to enhance the Association’s member interaction,” Zearley said.

“We are testing this in the largest agency in state government before we move on.”

To participate on the site, DHS members should send a request to opeadhs@gmail.com.



**“A**dding a social network to the list of services we provide not only separates us from other associations but also adds more value to our services for our members.”  
 – OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley



**Yes!** I'd like to participate in activities to help strengthen the voice of state employees and improve our jobs and the services we provide to Oklahomans.

### OPEA Dues Options

- Basic - \$15** ..... OPEA membership
- Bronze - \$20** ..... OPEA membership, OPEAPAC donation
- Silver - \$27** ..... OPEA membership, Identity theft
- Gold - \$29** ..... OPEA membership, Pre-Paid Legal
- Platinum - \$39** ..... OPEA membership, Pre-Paid Legal, Identity theft

## Oklahoma Public Employees Association Membership Application

Please return to: OPEA, 13 N.E. 28th St., Oklahoma City, Okla. 73105 or visit [www.opea.org](http://www.opea.org).



First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Home E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Work E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Agency \_\_\_\_\_ Work Location \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_

Work Location Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Work Fax Number ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ Who introduced you to OPEA? \_\_\_\_\_

### Payroll Deduction Authorization

I hereby authorize the state of Oklahoma to deduct from my pay the amount checked below required to purchase dues in the Oklahoma Public Employees Association, subject to my right to revoke this order by written notice to my employer.

**Dues Options:**  Basic - \$15  Bronze - \$20  Silver - \$27  Gold - \$29  Platinum - \$39

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ SS# \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Date \_\_\_\_\_

OPEA's standard dues are \$15 per month. Annual dues: state employees - \$180; retirees - \$60; associates - \$20; corporate affiliates - \$300. Contributions or gifts to OPEA are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes. However, dues payments are deductible as a miscellaneous itemized deduction. Dues include your annual subscription to *The Advocate* (a \$4 value). Your \$15 monthly dues payment includes a \$2.25 contribution to OPEAPAC.  I do not want \$2.25 per month of my dues to go to OPEAPAC.

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## Turnover Is Costly (Continued From Page 5)

recommendations of the task force, which completed its work in January 2008.

“The state needs a total compensation plan, which must be communicated to employees,” said Rice. “Pay adjustments should be made regularly based on what is happening in the economy.”

According to Rice, the state should plan ahead at least five years for total compensation, benefits and salary.

“State agencies cannot recruit new employees based on the hope that the Legislature will provide pay raises,” Zearley emphasized. “What do you tell new employees who want to know about career progression and when they will receive pay raises?”

Zearley did not concur with Rice when she said defined benefit pension plans are losing their popularity.

“Defined benefit plans are still the norm in the public sector,” said Zearley. “Only one state, Alaska, has discontinued its

pension plan for a 401(k)-type plan. With the recent problems in the stock market, I don’t think it’s a viable option.”

Secretary for Human Resources Oscar Jackson answered questions from the panel about initiatives in other states.

“States that have been successful in the human resource area are making a long-term commitment to their employees,” said Jackson. “Most of what we would want to do has a price tag.”

Following the hearing, Zearley spoke with several reporters about the need to address state employee pay in the next legislative session.

“We are pleased that Rep. John Wright has brought the issue forward this early in the process through this interim study,” said Zearley. “Several of the panelists agreed with OPEA that we must have a long-term plan to address state employee pay in Oklahoma. As so many veteran workers reach retirement, the state will need to recruit and retain the next generation of career state workers.”

Brandon Watkins • brandonw@opea.org

Trish Frazier • trishf@opea.org

### Your OPEA Staff Contacts

Tom McDonald • Thomas.McDonald@okdhs.org

Jann Ensz • Jann.Ensz@okdhs.org

Patricia Dill • patricia.dill@okdhs.org

Mark Rainville • mark.rainville@okdhs.org

### Your OKDHS OPEA Board Members

Oklahoma Public Employees Association  
13 N.E. 28th St. • Oklahoma City, OK 73105



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